ACCENTOR MODULARIS.

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Hedge-Accentor, or Hedgesparrow.

Motacilla modularis, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 89.

Sylvia modularis, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 511.

Accentor modularis, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iii. p. 617.

——— *pinetorum*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 457, tab. 21. fig. 1.

Curruca Eliotæ, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 24.

Tharrhaleus modularis, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 137.

It is a truism, well known, I presume, to every one, that while the daily thoughts of our manhood are as transient as a passing shower, many of the earlier occurrences of our lives are imprinted upon the mind never to be effaced. How pleasant it is when the blessing of memory enables us to revert to some of the more agreeable events of youth, and almost of our infancy! How well do I remember the day when my father lifted me by the arms to look into the nest of a Hedgesparrow in a shrub in our garden! this first sight of its beautiful verditer-blue eggs has never been forgotten; from that moment I became enamoured with nature and her charming attributes; it was then I received an impulse which has not only never lost its influence, but which has gone on acquiring new force through a long life. Similar reminiscences have doubtless been experienced by many of my readers, and probably in some instances may have reference to the same little bird; indeed this is more than likely from the frequency with which it is met with, its tameness and domesticity. The Hedgesparrow, like the Robin, is in fact part and parcel of the objects with which we are surrounded when in the country; like that bird, too, it is a stay-at-home, never leaving us either in summer or winter. With the utmost confidence it shuffles forth from beneath the Laurel hedge, and hops over the lawn or the gravel walk, never mounting to a conspicuous position, but creeping about more like a mouse than a bird. Its presence is baneful neither to blossom nor fruit; for it does not pick holes in the pears, like the impudent Tits, nor shell the peas, like the Sparrow; on the other hand, its food being principally insectivorous, it is a benefactor to our gardens rather than otherwise. Its little simple song is pleasing, although not so spirited or continuous as that of the Robin, with which it lives as peacefully as can be expected with a bird whose disposition is so bold and tyrannical.

The following account of the Hedgesparrow, extracted from my work on the 'Birds of Europe,' although written so many years ago, is still appropriate, except in so far that the interval of time that has elapsed since its publication has enabled me to ascertain that the range of the bird is much more extensive than is therein assigned to it. For instance, I shot examples during my visit to Malta, and I have a specimen from as far to the eastward as Erzeroum; Sommerfeldt states that it occurs at Muonioniska, in Norway, and Wheelwright that he found it as far north as Quickiock, in Lapland, but that there it appeared to be entirely confined to the lower fir-woods, and, unlike the English bird, to shun the companionship of man.

In this country, at least, it is frequently the foster-parent of the Cuckoo, and most assiduously does it feed and defend its charge until it is ungratefully reminded that its protection is no longer required.

"In every garden and in every hedgerow may this familiar but obscurely coloured bird be seen, not only throughout the whole of Great Britain, but nearly the whole of Central Europe. Though strictly belonging to the *Sylviadæ*, it is one of the few that make our island a permanent place of residence; it is also one of the hardiest of our small birds, and appears to brave the severest winters with indifference. It may be observed when the ground is frozen, and even covered with snow, as lively and alert as at other times in search of its food, which lies concealed on the surface of the earth, or among dead leaves on banks, bottoms of hedgerows, &c.; often, indeed, will it mingle with the common Sparrow, entering the farmyard, approaching within the precincts of human habitation, and displaying great confidence and familiarity. Its actions and manners are strictly terrestrial, which is to be accounted for principally from the circumstance of its food being mostly obtained on the ground; it progresses by a succession of short hops, inquisitively prying among the grass and leaves in search of insects, small worms, the seeds of plants, &c. During the spring the male pours forth its song, which, although not characterized by any great compass of scale, is nevertheless agreeable, and is not entirely suspended during the winter months; this fact is confirmed by Cuvier, who informs us that it cheers that season with its pleasant song: we also learn from this celebrated naturalist that, although a winter visitant in France, it retires northward in spring to breed, which is certainly not the case in our own island, as its nest and beautiful blue eggs are well known to every school-boy. It is an early breeder, frequently beginning to build in the month of March. The nest is usually placed in the thickest part of the hedgerow, and very frequently among furze and evergreens; it is generally

composed of moss and wool, intermingled with fine roots and slender bits of twig, with a lining of hair : the eggs are four or five in number, of a beautiful verditer-blue."

Mr. Hewitson says that the nest is sometimes built almost entirely of dry grass, that in two instances he has seen it so imperfectly finished that the thorns were sticking through the inside, apparently very much to the discomfort of the old bird, and that he does not remember to have ever found one, except near to some habitation.

"At all seasons," says Macgillivray, "these birds are seen in the gardens, and by the hedges near houses ; but during winter and spring they are much more numerous there ; for those which in summer preferred remote places then approach the habitations of man, although some still keep aloof. Hawthorn hedges are their favourite haunts, and on the ground along their bases they search for small seeds and insects, frequently making short pedestrian excursions into the fields on the one hand or the footpath on the other. They flit about among the bushes with great liveliness, often running along the ground, and seldom perching on the upper branches. Owing to the dulness of their colouring and the celerity with which they take shelter, they are not very readily perceived ; but they can scarcely be called shy under any circumstances ; and they often allow of approach within a few yards, or even feet, without showing any apprehension. Even in winter they are not at all gregarious ; for you seldom find more than two or three together, and it is very rare to see two flying in the same direction. Their flights are generally very short, and without undulation.

"After the middle of spring they are less frequently seen about houses ; and at all seasons they are to be found in hedges and among bushes, seldom appearing in open ground or upon trees. In fine weather they sing even in winter ; nor is there any season of the year at which they are entirely mute ; but from the middle of spring to the end of May especially, they are heard chanting their short, clear, pleasantly modulated but not remarkably mellow song, generally when perched on a twig, but sometimes on the ground or on a wall. During the breeding-season the shake of their wings increases to a shuffle, or kind of flutter, which they execute at short intervals ; and this habit can hardly fail to be observed by the most incurious. Their ordinary cry is a slight 'cheep.' They are not by any means quarrelsome, either among themselves or other small birds, and they seem to pair in the quietest manner possible."

Although I have said that the Hedge-Accentor is stationary in this country, it seems likely that a large accession to the number of resident birds takes place in spring ; for Mr. Bartlett tells me that on the morning of the 18th of April, 1868, he observed many in the Gardens of the Zoological Society, which appeared to have arrived in the night ; he also informed me that a pair or two remain in the Gardens during the whole of the winter.

The sexes of the Hedge-Accentor are so very similar in colour that by dissection alone can the male be distinguished from the female. I must remark that the bird killed by me in Malta, and a specimen in my collection from the environs of Batum, in Turkey, are somewhat redder in their general tone of colouring, and of smaller size, than our birds. Feathers of the head, upper surface, and wing-coverts olive, with a broad mark of blackish brown down the centre of each ; primaries, secondaries, and tail-feathers brown, margined with olive ; ear-coverts brown, striated with whitish ; sides of head, neck, and breast grey, fading into greyish-white on the chin, and into still duller white on the abdomen ; flanks olive, streaked with brown ; under tail-coverts brown, margined with dull white ; bill black, feet flesh-colour.

A young bird caught on the 8th of May had the bill very broad at the base, and of a dull purplish red, passing into olivaceous orange towards the tip, where it was brilliant and transparent ; the gape swollen or dilated ; inside of the mouth and tongue brilliant orange ; irides dark olivaceous hazel ; a neat ring of feathers round the eye ; breast and upper surface browner and much more spotted than in the adult ; the legs and feet purplish flesh-colour.

I must not close this paper without remarking that, although the bird here represented is commonly known by the trivial name of Hedgesparrow, it is not related to the Sparrows, but is a true Sylviine bird.

The figures are of the natural size. The scarlet fungus is the *Peziza coccinea*.

Gould, John. 1873. "Hedge-Accentor, or Hedgesparrow, Accentor modularis [Pl. 55]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323869>.

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